

# 'Dead Creek' catches attention of health officials

10 By ST. LOUIS JOURNAL STAFF

A Cahokia creek, found to contain high concentrations of potentially harmful chemicals and heavy metals, was brought to the attention of state and local health officials last week, apparently after many years of problems.

"Dead Creek", a ditch that runs from Judith Lane in Cahokia to Queeny Ave. in Sauget, was fenced off after soil samples analyzed by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency were found to contain high levels of "extremely hazardous" chemicals, including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), Cahokia Health Officer Tonie Townsend said.

Although area residents say the creek has been a problem for many years, Townsend said that the matter had been brought to his attention only last May after a large section of the ditch caught fire.

"I have no idea (why the subject hadn't come up before)," Townsend said Friday. "Residents never reported it. I became aware of it after a fire May 2," after which he had the EPA take soil samples.

Townsend said that he called the EPA periodically when the results were delayed, but a backlogged laboratory and a broken piece of equipment prevented analysis of the samples.

However, when news of the creek broke, Townsend said, the EPA's head chemist came down from Springfield to gather additional samples, including water samples to determine whether the water supply has been contaminated.

EPA officials are concerned that the chemicals have already reached the water level, which is only three feet under the ditch.

However, John Muraro, an EPA spokesman, said that he "sees no threat to the waterways at this point."

Results of the water samples were to have been available Monday, Muraro said.

Residents also said that the ditch smoked periodically in hot weather and sometimes gave off a purplish glow. An EPA spokesman said that the high concentration of phosphorus in the ditch—120,000 parts per million—could explain the smoking, as the chemical becomes reactive at 86 degrees Fahrenheit.

The EPA is currently investigating the extent of the concentration of the materials in the ditch, Townsend said. The extent of the contamination will determine what action is taken.

Included in the investigation is finding who is responsible for dumping the chemicals. Muraro said that there are a few possibilities, but declined to comment. However, Townsend said that there is some speculation about a trucking company that existed in Sauget that reportedly hauled hazardous waste.

"The trucking company may have had something to do with it," Townsend said. "But they've been out of

business for such a long time, we don't even know their name."

The fact that the PCB level in the ditch ranges from 5,200 parts per million near Queeny to 120 parts per million at Judith supports that theory, Townsend pointed out.

A preliminary list of the soil sample results included high concentrations of 18 heavy materials. Besides the PCBs and phosphorus, among the highest concentrations were iron, 70,000 parts per million; copper, 32,000 parts per million; and zinc, 25,000 parts per million.

Plants near the creek include Monsanto Co.'s Krummrich Plant, Amax Zinc and Cerro Copper, among others.

A Monsanto spokesman, John Spano, said that there is no evidence to link us with the problem.

"The state is investigating it, and we will help in any way we can," Spano said. "It may (become apparent that Monsanto is involved) in the future. But this (the creek) goes way back in history. It's difficult to try to unravel."

"But there are several industries in the area, and to pinpoint one is unfair. We cannot assume responsibility for this," Spano said.

Muraro said that the EPA hoped to know what course would be taken with the ditch by today.

"It's a static situation right now," he said Friday. "We don't know exactly what to do with it...it all depends on the concentration (of the chemicals)."

"They're probably going to have to dig that ditch up completely—and they're worried about where the money's going to come from," Townsend concluded. "I'm just concerned about getting it cleaned up and getting it decent to live over there."



PETE LAUMAN, 105 Judith, Cahokia, stands before a smoldering spot of land near a creek in Cahokia. After samples of soil were analyzed by the IEPA, the creek was fenced off (below). Cahokia Health officer said that while area residents have main-

tained the creek has been a problem for years, he was notified of the situation only last May, after a large section of the ditch caught fire, the EPA is currently investigating the extent of concentration of hazardous materials in the ditch.

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